DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 292 177 EA 019 855

AUTHOR Daresh, John C.
TITLE Principals' Perceptions of Collegial Support as a Component of Administrative Inservice.
PUB DATE Oct 82
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, October 15, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role; Elementary Education; Group Dynamics; *Inservice Education; Instructional Leadership; Interviews; Junior High Schools; Management Development; *Peer Influence; *Principals; Problem Solving; School Effectiveness
IDENTIFIERS *Collegiality; *Principals Inservice Project

ABSTRACT

To address the problem of increasing professional isolation of building administrators, the Principals' Inservice Project helps establish principals' collegial support groups across the nation. The groups are typically composed of 6 to 10 principals who meet at least once each month over a 2-year period. One collegial support group of seven principals underwent onsite analysis to determine the extent of the collaborative arrangement. The review of the group included individual interviews with each principal and the facilitator and observations of group meetings. All principals indicated that the collegial support group allowed members to share common problems with other administrators and to use suggestions from the group to generate possible solutions. Newer principals viewed the group as a learning experience; experienced principals saw the collegial arrangement as a way to keep them focused on their present roles. The principals were unanimous in stating that they wanted structure in group meetings, though the facilitator felt that the group relied on him too much. The third issue explored dealt with the demonstrable results in the schools of principals participating in the project. All the principals agreed that their involvement with the project had already paid some dividends to their schools and district. (MLF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED292177

PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF COLLEGIAL SUPPORT AS A COMPONENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE INSERVICE

by

John C. Daresh
Assistant Professor
Educational Administration
University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati, Ohio

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

John C. Daresh

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA019855

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
Midwestern Educational Research Association
Chicago, Illinois
October 15, 1982

PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF COLLEGIAL SUPPORT AS A COMPONENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE INSERVICE

by
John C. Daresh

Among the various factors identified in the most recent research on school effectiveness, it is clear that one of the most potent is the leadership behavior of the individual school principal (Wellisch, et al., 1978; Austin, 1979; Brundage, 1980; Lipham, 1981). Yet relatively little has been done to promote systematic inservice for principals. As a response to a growing concern about this situation by practitioners and theorists, the national Principals' Inservice Project was started with the support of /I/D/E/A/, the educational division of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation. The Project now serves as a major effort of the Administrative Inservice Center at the University of Cincinnati.

The rationale for the Principals' Inservice Project has always been based on a simple observation. School building administrators, after their initial preparation in university graduate programs, are generally limited to further inservice activities of two kinds: formal continuing education courses at nearby colleges and universities, or training seminars, conferences, and conventions sponsored by professional associations. Although these efforts can be extremely useful, they tend to be one-way instruction; that is, the principal comes to listen to others. All too often, principals have not been

able to find forums for maintaining contacts and sharing/learning with their peers.

Frequently, the principal, as an isolated member of a district's administrative team, attends a university course or professional conference, is exposed to new ideas and skills, and returns home with a "bag of new tricks." The obvious difficulty in this arrangement is that the principal generally must then go at things alone, unable to share success or failure with other administrators. Some principals are content with such a system and, in fact, thrive in an isolated environment, free from competition with peers. Most administrators, however, find an environment devoid of cooperation among colleagues to be extremely frustrating.

To address the problem of increasing professional isolation of building administrators, the Principals' Inservice Project (LaPlant, 1978) helps establish principals' collegial support groups across the nation. These groups, each headed by an /I/D/E/A/-trained facilitator, are typically composed of six to ten principals who meet at least once each month over a two-year period to assist and encourage one another in the areas of professional and personal development and school improvement. Ideally, collegial support groups enable principals to share ideas, problems, and solutions in a climate of mutual trust, respect, and assistance.

Group sessions offer a departure from conventional one-

way instruction in which the individual is viewed as the learner and another person--professor, workshop leader, conference presenter, et al.--is seen as the instructor. In the collegial support group, the emphasis is on shared learning. The facilitator does what the title implies--he or she provides an environment wherein the principals are able to share concerns, generate possible solutions to group or individual problems, and provide feedback on personal and professional development and school improvement plans. Currently, nearly one thousand principals of urban, rural, and suburban schools across the United States and Canada are engaged as members of more than one hundred collegial support groups.

Recently, one collegial support group underwent extensive on-site analysis to determine the extent to which the promise of the collaborative arrangement was being met. This paper focuses on the findings of that analysis.

The Group

The group reviewed was felt to be representative of other collegial groups functioning throughout the United States. It was made up of seven principals--five from elementary schools and two from junior high schools--and the facilitator. The principals' experience varied from less than two years to more than 25 years as building administrators, and their ages ranged from the early 30's to over 60. They represented schools in urban, suburban, and rural districts. Only two came from the

same district.

The facilitator, a staff member from a regional office of the state education agency (SEA), had experience and training as a group process facilitator for other state and national activities, including both the Wisconsin and /I/D/E/A/ models of Individually Guided Education (IGE). Serving as a group facilitator for the collegial support group was part of the duties assigned to him by the SEA for the school year.

The group as observed had been together for one school year. In addition to exchanges during the monthly day-long formal meetings of the group, a good deal of communication took place among the members on an informal basis as well.

When interviewed, principals indicated that there was a tendency to call on one another for support at times other than the formal meetings, and that this was a desirable outcome of the project.

Methods

The review of the group included individual interviews with each principal and facilitator, and observations of regular meetings of the group. The observations helped determine the extent to which respondents' perceptions were supported by group behavior. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to nearly two hours and included the following questions:

1. What is the best thing about the principals' inservice collegial support group?

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2. In what ways could the collegial support group concept be improved?

3. What are some of the benefits to your school resulting from your involvement in the support group?

Findings

Responses to the first question showed a remarkable similarity. All principals indicated that the best thing about the collegial support group was that it allowed members both to share common problems with other administrators, and also to use suggestions from the group to generate possible solutions. The monthly "in-basket" exercise--a structured, group problem-solving process wherein each participant is invited to articulate a specific school-related concern before the group and ask colleagues for potential solutions--was cited by all principals as a very valuable activity for each meeting. One principal summarized the value of this problem sharing when he observed, "The fact that we can get together and hear so many different points of view establishes a sense of easiness and a positive attitude." Another principal, an administrator with more than 20 years' experience, echoed this response by noting that, even as a veteran, he was always learning new ways of doing things from the other group members.

Each person's response to shared problem-solving, however, appeared to be related to the amount of experience as a principal. Three of the group members were serving in their first

principalship. One of the best features of the collegial support group for them was that it helped them to understand more fully the prescribed role of the principal. One of these principals stated, "Collegiality is important. The group has let me see more clearly where I am as a professional and as a person." Another principal indicated, "It has really helped me to build my confidence [as a principal]. The group concept has confirmed my personal belief that the principal's role is first to work with people and not with a maze of paper."

The collegial support group appeared to fulfill the needs of newer principals for a learning experience to cap their more formal graduate work in Educational Administration. With the exception of one person, beginning principals were not so much dissatisfied with university courses as they were appreciative of the fact that the collegial support group existed to add to their university experiences.

Experienced principals offered a different perspective. While most were not seeking a professional identity as were their younger colleagues, they did see the collegial arrangement as a way to keep them focused on their present roles rather than becoming dissatisfied and looking for outside interests or other administrative positions.

The facilitator indicated that the collegial support group afforded him an opportunity to refine some of his personal

skills as a group process facilitator and, even more significantly, to derive satisfaction from the growth of the principals involved.

Responses to the question concerning how the collegial support group concept could be improved revealed a distinct difference in attitudes between the principals and the facilitator. The principals were unanimous in stating that they wanted much structure in group meetings, to be derived from directiveness by the facilitator. In particular, the less-experienced principals indicated that they felt frustrated because the facilitator refused to spell out precisely what was to be done next by the group. On the other hand, the facilitator felt that the group relied on him too much. Nevertheless, both the principals and the facilitator believed that, without specific direction from the facilitator, the collegial support group could very easily be reduced from a problem-solving arrangement to a social gathering.

The third issue explored dealt with the demonstrable results in the schools of principals participating in the project. This issue was of importance for two reasons. First, an explicit goal of the Principals' Inservice Project is not only to provide professional development for the administrators themselves, but more important, to improve the quality of education for students. Second, principals who participate in the project are ultimately accountable to school districts who

demand a return for the investment of their principals' time.

Since the group studied had been together for only a year, no dramatic results could yet be observed in terms of increased student achievement or any other outcome. All the participating principals agreed, however, that their involvement with the project had already paid some dividends to their schools and districts. For example, one principal observed,

> The district has gotten a lot more productivity out of me...more efficient behavior because I've learned some things about time management from the group. As a result, I think I'm more effective as a principal.

Conclusions

First, the study confirmed that collegial support is essentially a sound practice with tremendous potential for improving the quality of inservice support available for local school principals. Particularly for beginning principals, the collegial support group concept allows administrators to work cooperatively to propose solutions for numerous daily problems and, even more important, to escape from the need to devote all their time and energy to daily managerial issues and tasks. Thus, principals are free to exercise a more creative approach to problem solving and may, over time, engage in the often illusive role of instructional leaders of their schools. Simply stated, the collegial support group can become a way for principals to consider daily concerns quickly

and efficiently, and then move rapidly to tackle more lasting issues.

Second, there is no question about the continued need to focus attention on improving the abilities and skills of school principals. The collegial support group provides hope for easing the conflicts which will be a major part of the principal's role in the foreseeable future. If we expect the principal to be the key person in providing answers to continuing problems, the educational community has an obligation to provide support. The collegial support group concept, as seen in this study, has the potential to provide this support.

References

Austin, G.R. Exemplary schools and the search for effectiveness. Educational Leadership, 1979, 37 (1), 10-14.

Brundage, D. (Ed.) The Journalism Research Fellows Report: What Makes an Effective School? Washington, D.C.: Institute for Educational Leadership, George Washington University, 1980.

LaPlant, J. Principals Inservice Project. Dayton, Ohio: Institute for Development of Educational Activities, Inc., Charles F. Kettering Foundation, 1979.

Lipham, J.M. Effective Principal, Effective School. Reston, Virginia: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1981.

Wellisch, J.B., MacQueen, A.H., Carriere, R.A., and Duck, G.A. School management and organization in effective schools. Sociology of Education, July 1978, 211-226.